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Eve and Evolution: Christian Responses to the First Woman Question, 1860–1900

Diarmid A. Finnegan

INTRODUCTION

In 1890, in the midst of a typically acerbic article criticizing a set of recently published theological essays, Thomas Henry Huxley argued that the story of Eve's creation from Adam's side was not one that Christians could simply relegate to the realm of myth. The primary objection was the fact that Matthew's Gospel recorded the words of Jesus himself: "He which made them from the beginning made them male and female and said for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and the twain shall become one flesh." If this statement did not claim "Divine authority" for the description of Eve's origin in Genesis 2, "what," Huxley asked, "was the value of language"? Of course, the agnostic Huxley was not slow to point out the real problem for the conscientious Christian: the divinely authorized account of Eve's creation was now known to be more "monstrously improbable" than the patently fictional story of Noah's flood.¹

By arguing that Eve's creation was at once indispensable for Christian belief and, judged at the bar of scientific history, fantastical, Huxley deliberately sharpened an age-old dilemma. Martin Luther, for instance, had conceded centuries earlier that the derivation of Eve from Adam's side seemed

¹ Thomas H. Huxley, "The Lights of the Church and the Light of Science," *Nineteenth Century* 28 (1890): 21.

to human reason an “outrageous absurdity.” Yet its “plain truth” was “openly declared” in sacred Scripture.² For Luther, of course, the foolishness of Scripture was wiser than the wisdom of the world. The dilemma had, however, become a particularly troublesome one in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In that period, the historical veracity of the formation of the first woman became a significant concern for Christian thinkers eager, on the one hand, to accommodate or combat evolutionary accounts of human origins, and on the other, to maintain theological and social doctrines tightly tied to the Genesis text describing Eve’s creation. Historians concerned with encounters between Christian thinkers and the science of human origins in the late nineteenth century have not explored this predicament in any detail. We know a good deal about the reactions of Christian thinkers to human evolution in general.³ Scholars have also analyzed the mobilization of evolutionary ideas in debates about the nature and role of women in the late nineteenth century,⁴ but how the creation of Eve featured in Christian responses to human evolution has been largely overlooked.

For a number of prominent figures engaged in debates about the theological implications of human evolution, the creation of Eve was an especially stubborn sticking point. Among more conservative commentators anxious either to make room for or oppose an evolutionary understanding of the emergence of humans, it was frequently noted that the description in Genesis 2 of the creation of Eve, unlike the earlier depiction of the creation of Adam, could not be reinterpreted to accommodate evolution. To their minds, the account of Eve’s being built from Adam’s rib was simply too precise and detailed to allow for an evolutionary explanation. As it turns out, however, in religious disputes over Eve and evolution, much more than exegetical exactitude was at stake. For these same thinkers, denying a historical Eve formed from Adam’s side threatened important theological

² Martin Luther, *The Creation: A Commentary on the First Five Chapters of the Book of Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1858), 166.

³ Adrian Desmond and James R. Moore, *Darwin’s Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); David N. Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Jon H. Roberts, *Darwinism and the Divine in America* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

⁴ Penelope Deutscher, “The Descent of Man and the Evolution of Woman,” *Hypatia* 19 (2004): 35–55; Sally G. Kohlstedt and Mark R. Jorgensen, “‘The Irrepressible Woman Question’: Women’s Responses to Evolutionary Ideology,” in *Disseminating Darwinism*, ed. Ron L. Numbers and John Stenhouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 267–93; Evellen Richards, “Darwin and the Descent of Woman,” in *The Wider Domain of Evolutionary Thought*, ed. David Oldroyd and Ian Langham (London: D. Reidel, 1983), 57–111; Cynthia E. Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

truths. Among the more prominent were monogamous marriage, the indissoluble (and for some, sacramental) character of the marriage union, the subordinate position of wives to husbands, the exclusion of women from positions of authority in church, and the designation of the domestic sphere as woman's allotted place. Also important in certain quarters was the belief that Eve's creation prefigured the formation of the church, the spouse of Christ. As well as being grounded in Genesis 2, all of these doctrines were thought to be closely wedded to New Testament references to Eve's creation. Added to this was the crucial fact that the defense of these core commitments was made more urgent in being linked to wider debates about the role of women, and marriage, in church and society. These debates impinged upon the more strictly religious discussions to a greater or lesser degree depending on local circumstances and the theological persuasions of those involved.

To begin to chart these entanglements, this essay examines negotiations over Eve and evolution within three relatively distinct interpretive communities in Britain and the United States. In the first section, I explore deliberations over Eve's creation among British Anglicans eager to reflect on scientific advances and, at the same time, retain an understanding of marriage as an indissoluble "one flesh" union. In the second section, I trace anxieties over Eve's creation among conservative Presbyterian and Congregational theologians in the United States in the face of disputes over the role of women in church and society. The third and final section considers discussions between Roman Catholic thinkers troubled, among other things, by the consequences of an evolutionary explanation of the origin of the first woman for a sacramental view of Christian marriage.

FLESH OF MY FLESH: ANGLICANS ON EVE, ALLEGORY, AND INCEST

A few weeks after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, the Rev. Leonard Jenyns, Anglican vicar and amateur naturalist, wrote to Charles Darwin to offer his reactions. Jenyns, an old friend, thought it "one of the most valuable contributions to Nat. Hist. Literature of the present day." Turning to the question of evolution, Jenyns admitted that he could "embrace [the] theory in part" but confessed that he hesitated over its reach. The single "great difficulty" standing in the way was the application of descent with modification to humans. Though not wanting to merge science and Scripture, Jenyns could "hardly see what sense of meaning is to

be attached to Gen: 2:7 & yet more to vv. 21. 22, of the same chapter, giving an account of the creation of *woman*.”⁵

Faced with the same problem, some Anglican thinkers made the radical suggestion that the creation of Eve was a fable without any basis in history. In his contribution to *Essays and Reviews* (1860), the Egyptologist and amateur geologist Charles Goodwin argued that Genesis 1 was a “plain statement of [supposed] facts” flatly contradicted by modern science. The literary genre of the second creation account, on other hand, justified a “mystical” reading of the formation of Eve that removed it from the realm of history or science.⁶ A little over a decade later, the Dean of Canterbury, Henry Alford, made a similar move.⁷ Most notably, Frederick Temple, later elected Archbishop of Canterbury, took a comparable line in his Brampton lectures in 1884. In the Garden of Eden allegory, he suggested, there was “nothing whatever that crosses the path of science.”⁸ Significantly, however, Temple did not specifically address the passage dealing with Eve’s creation.

Although such views were clearly influential, another common approach among Anglican commentators was to acknowledge the metaphorical nature of the description of Eve’s creation but insist that some kind of factual or historical residuum lay behind the symbolism.⁹ A sustained and detailed statement of this view appeared in 1866 in a book entitled *Genesis and its Authorship* by the Irish Anglican rector and biblical scholar John Quarry.¹⁰ Quarry’s book, widely referred to by other Anglican interpreters, suggested that the account of the formation of Eve from Adam’s side was “an inspired allegorical representation” of an actual event.¹¹ Reading it as a straightforward description of the creation of the first woman was “ludicrous and silly.”¹² Building on this hermeneutic, Quarry suggested that the “general law” that a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife could not be based on one woman’s being physically “built” from

⁵ Frederick Burkhardt et al., eds., *Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, 19 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 8:14 (emphasis original).

⁶ Charles W. Goodwin, “On the Mosaic Cosmogony,” in *Essays and Reviews* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1860), 223.

⁷ Henry Alford, *The Book of Genesis and part of the Book of Exodus* (London: Strahan & Co., 1872), 14.

⁸ Frederick Temple, *The Relations Between Religion and Science* (London: Macmillan, 1884), 184.

⁹ For example Gilbert Rorison, “The Creative Week,” in *Replies to Essays and Reviews* (Oxford: John Henry and James Parker, 1862), 277–346.

¹⁰ John Quarry, *Genesis and its Authorship* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1866), v, 82.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹² *Ibid.*, 145.

a man's side. Rather, "only in a mystical and allegorical sense, what is related . . . of the first pair becomes a foundation for the unity of man and wife as one flesh in all time to come."¹³ Crucially, however, none of this was meant to suggest that Eve's creation was an "apologue without an historical basis." For all the symbolic language, the narrative was still "grounded in fact." Among other things, Quarry was keen to stress that the first woman was in some real sense "bone of the man's bone and flesh of his flesh" and "mother of all living."¹⁴

If Quarry's views represented a middle ground, there were others who defended a more staunchly conservative position. In 1875, Christopher Wordsworth, then Bishop of Lincoln, warned that rejecting the "physical fact" of the creation of woman from the first man would undermine the "spiritual doctrines of the gospel." This was consistent with Wordsworth's wholesale rejection of evolution and with his high churchmanship. Among the doctrines that Wordsworth tied to the creation of Eve from Adam were "man's headship and woman's subordinate and derivative existence" and the "holiness of the conjugal relationship."¹⁵ These fundamental created realities also made manifest profound truths about Christ and the Church. Christ was the second Adam and Eve was a type of the universal Church. Just as Eve was derived from Adam's side, so the Church was formed from the water and blood that flowed from Christ's pierced side. All of these bedrock confessions rested on the historical veracity of Eve's derivation from Adam's body. For Wordsworth, an evolutionary explanation for the first woman was out of the question.

The range of opinions on Eve's creation that formed among Anglican commentators in the wake of a growing acceptance of an evolutionary account of human origins comes as no surprise.¹⁶ They reflected the diverse set of views on how best to relate science and Scripture found among Anglican commentators.¹⁷ But how Eve's creation was understood also had a

¹³ Ibid., 121.

¹⁴ Ibid., 154.

¹⁵ Christopher Wordsworth, *The Holy Bible with Notes and Introductions*, vol. 1, *The Five Books of Moses* (London: Rivingtons, 1875), 17.

¹⁶ For two further instances, cf. Harvey Goodwin, *Essays on the Pentateuch* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co., 1867), 58; and E. Harold Browne, *The Holy Bible . . . with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary*, vol. 1, pt. 1, *Genesis-Exodus* (London: John Murray, 1871), 42–43.

¹⁷ For one survey, see George P. Elder, *Chronic Vigour: Darwin, Anglicans, Catholics, and the Development of a Doctrine of Providential Evolution* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996). See also John Rogerson, "What Difference did Darwin Make? The Interpretation of Genesis in the Nineteenth Century," in *Reading Genesis after Darwin*, ed. Stephen C. Barton and David Wilkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 75–91.

specific cultural bearing in being bound up with heated public and political debates about marriage and gender. In particular, ecclesiastical and parliamentary wrangling over legislation prohibiting marriage with a deceased wife's sister intensified the political significance of Eve's creation and exerted a unique pressure on Anglicans concerned about the challenges posed by evolution but committed to the foundational significance of the biblical account of the formation of the first woman.

Agitation against the statute outlawing marriage to a deceased wife's sister had formally begun in 1842 with the introduction into Parliament of a bill designed to overturn it. The Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, as it was called, was not passed until 1907, a fact due in large part to the efforts of Anglican bishops to block it in the House of Lords. A crucial dimension of the debate, at least as it played out in the upper house, was an appeal to Genesis 2:23–24. Adam's exclamation on first encountering Eve, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh," and the declaration that followed, "she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh," provided the basis for an understanding of the marital bond that made a spouse's close relatives equivalent to blood relations. The verses were widely thought to be the hermeneutical key that unlocked the meaning, scope, and binding character of the list of prohibited sexual unions in Leviticus 18, along with the additions later inferred from it by Archbishop Parker in 1563 and listed in the "table of kindred and affinity" incorporated into the *Book of Common Prayer*. The entire list became part of canon law in 1603 and was written into common law with the passing of Lord Lyndhurst's Act in 1835.¹⁸ The prohibition against marriage to a deceased wife's sister was the most controversial. One reason for this was scriptural. Leviticus 18:18, as normally translated, only ruled against marrying a wife's sister "in her life time," suggesting permission to do so after a wife had died. For those opposing the reform of Lord Lyndhurst's Act, the implied freedom to marry a *deceased* wife's sister was only apparent and was contradicted by other analogous prohibitions. Stressing the fact that husband and wife were bound in an indissoluble physical union was widely believed to clinch the case.

The argument that man and wife became one flesh was regularly aired in the House of Lords during readings of the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill.

¹⁸ Cynthia F. Behrman, "The Annual Blister: A Sidelight on Victorian Social and Parliamentary History," *Victorian Studies* 11 (1968): 483–502; Nancy F. Anderson, "The 'Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister Bill' Controversy," *Journal of British Studies* 21 (1982): 67–86.

The Lords Spiritual in particular cited the “one flesh” argument as the clearest biblical rationale for rejecting reform. In 1870, for example, Christopher Wordsworth noted that in both the Old and New Testaments it was clearly stated that “man and wife are one flesh.”¹⁹ In the same debate, the Bishop of Peterborough, William Magee, downplayed the importance of the Levitical prohibitions (which he felt were specially adapted to “the needs of the Jews”) but argued against reform on the “highest ground” of all, namely the pronouncement that husband and wife become one flesh.²⁰ More than a decade later the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward Benson, made the same claim, noting that “we rely on a higher authority than the words of Leviticus—namely, the statement of our Lord, when He said that a man and his wife are one flesh.”²¹ A similar appeal was made in public meetings organized in support of the efforts of the Lords Spiritual. In June 1883, for example, the popular Anglican preacher William John Knox-Little addressed a large crowd gathered in a London hall to agitate against efforts to repeal Lord Lyndhurst’s Act. Against those who disputed the scriptural basis for prohibiting a man from marrying his deceased wife’s sister, Knox-Little declared that “if you accept the words of our Blessed Master reproducing the earlier marriage ordinance of the Almighty, ‘they twain shall be one flesh’ then you assert a sanctity about affinity which runs parallel to the sanctity of blood [cheers].” Continuing, he noted that “there were certain number of persons who desired to re-write the earlier chapters of Genesis,” to bring it into line with evolutionism. Knox-Little was not among them: “I cling to the old law of Genesis, reproduced, insisted upon, sanctioned by our Divine Master.”²²

As we have seen, among the Lords Spiritual there were those who maintained that the biblical story of Eve’s creation was best understood as poetical, as opposed to historical.²³ That did not prevent them from arguing

¹⁹ Hansard, HL Deb 19 May 1870, vol. 201, col. 927–928. See also Christopher Wordsworth, *Marriage to a Deceased Wife’s Sister* (London: Rivingtons, 1876).

²⁰ Hansard, HL Deb 19 May 1870, vol. 201, col. 938.

²¹ Hansard, HL Deb 11 June 1883, vol. 280, col. 173.

²² *Marriage with a Deceased Wife’s Sister: Report of Proceedings of a Meeting in Opposition to the Deceased Wife’s Sister Bill* (London, 1883), 26.

²³ Of the twenty-two bishops who voted against the Deceased Wife’s Sister Bill in June 1883, at least two, Harvey Goodwin and Frederick Temple, regarded Eve’s creation as purely metaphorical. For Goodwin see Harvey Goodwin, *Creation* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1886); and Harvey Goodwin, “Belief and Doubt,” *Nineteenth Century* (1887): 878–79. Other bishops strongly disagreed. Wordsworth and Harold Browne, for example, rejected human evolution (on Browne see note 16). So, too, did Charles Ellicott. For Ellicott’s views, see “Gloucester and Bristol Diocesan Conference,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, October 11, 1888. See also Charles J. Ellicott, *Christus Comprobator* (London: SPCK, 1892), 134–36.

against the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill on the basis of the "one flesh" union between husband and wife.²⁴ But such a position was vulnerable to attack, and not just from fellow bishops, like Wordsworth or Harold Browne, anxious about making a radical concession to evolutionary science and biblical criticism. On two occasions, once in June 1889 and again in July 1890, Thomas Henry Huxley used the pages of *Nineteenth Century* to pour scorn on the veracity of Eve's creation as recorded in Genesis 2 and excoriate its use as an argument against marriage to a deceased wife's sister. The first of Huxley's references to Eve appeared in a riposte to the Anglican apologist Henry Wace's critique of agnosticism. Here, as well as underlining the utter implausibility of the "strict historical accuracy" of Eve's creation, Huxley noted, knowingly, that this fanciful belief had long functioned as the basis for the "chief argument" made by "the defenders of an iniquitous portion of our present marriage law."²⁵ Eve appeared again a year later in Huxley's review of *Lux Mundi*, a series of essays written by a group of liberal-minded Anglo-Catholic theologians. To Huxley, the authors, in their quest to make Christianity respectable in a scientific age, had entirely removed it from "contact with fact of any kind." This, he declared, was both understandable (the facts were all against the core claims of Christian belief) and completely untenable (without a factual basis, Christianity dissolved into fiction). As we have seen, along with other scriptural affirmations, Huxley declared the story of the creation of woman "monstrously improbable." Yet the reference to the manner and meaning of Eve's creation by Jesus made it a binding belief for any Christian, and this reference, Huxley continued, was "unhappily famous for the legal repression to which it has been wrongfully forced to lend itself."²⁶ The only way out was to abandon Christianity, one happy consequence of which would be the disappearance of the primary argument against marriage reform.

The biting tone of Huxley's critique was typical. He had, however, an additional reason to be galled by the use made of Eve's creation in debates over marrying a deceased wife's sister. In March 1889, his daughter Ethel had been forced to travel to Norway to marry her sister's husband, John Collier.²⁷ It is no surprise, then, that Huxley found the prohibition of such

²⁴ See for example Frederick Temple, *Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister* (Exeter: James Townsend, 1882).

²⁵ Thomas H. Huxley, "Agnosticism and Christianity," *Nineteenth Century* 25 (1889): 950–51.

²⁶ Huxley, "Lights of the Church," 21.

²⁷ Adrian Desmond, *Huxley: From Devil's Disciple to Evolution's High Priest* (Reading, Mass.: Helix Books, 1997), 569, 572.

marriages in England especially infuriating and the scriptural argument in favor of that prohibition particularly annoying. No wonder that he pressed Anglicans onto the horns of an impossible dilemma: either jettison baseless theological objections to legal reform or retreat into an obscurantism incompatible with honorable participation in formal political debate.

None of this is to suggest that the deceased wife's sister question was the only relevant controversy with a bearing on Anglican interpretations of Eve's creation conducted in the light of evolutionary science. Nevertheless, of all the negotiations over gender or marriage, the perennial and prolific nature of the debates about the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill created a unique and abiding challenge for Anglicans wrestling with the biblical account of the creation of the first woman. The Lords Spiritual in particular had to defend a law that was in many respects uniquely Anglican and which rested on an understanding of marriage closely tied to the account of Eve's creation. The importance attached to the idea that, in consequence of Eve's derivation from Adam's bone and flesh, man and wife were reunited in an indissoluble bond that rendered immediate in-laws equivalent to consanguineous relations meant that proposing a figurative reading of Genesis 2, while possible, was particularly vulnerable to criticism from all sides. This placed Anglican leaders and biblical commentators in an awkward bind. Whatever their different conclusions, all were eager to stay abreast of the intellectual developments of their age and thus had to take human evolution seriously. At the same time, there were strong reasons to continue to defend, in however veiled a way, the historical reality of Eve's creation. It was, I submit, a peculiarly Anglican predicament.

AMERICAN CALVINISTS AND EVE THE EXCEPTION

Across the Atlantic and among theologians committed to a Calvinist orthodoxy resistant to liberalizing trends within their own denominations, marriage to a deceased wife's sister was not first on the list of theological commitments thought to be threatened by the application of evolution to Eve. On the other hand, debates about woman's rights in church and wider society were very much on the minds of traditional Calvinists. By the 1870s, these debates were prominent in the proceedings of synods and the General Assembly of the Northern Presbyterian Church. To Southern Presbyterians, at that time part of a separate denomination, this was a clear sign that their northern sister church was departing from the Westminster standards. Thus worries about threats to the traditional understanding of gender roles and

relations made proposing a less than strictly literal reading of the verses in Genesis describing the creation of Eve from Adam's side particularly problematic.

One of the most direct attempts to tackle the question of Eve, evolution, and gender appeared in 1878 in an article published in the *Princeton Review*, a journal long associated with conservative Presbyterianism. Written by the Rev. John T. Duffield, professor of mathematics at the College of New Jersey, the article's aim was not to determine whether evolutionary science could be reconciled with theism, "a matter of little moment," but to decide whether it was compatible with "revealed religion."²⁸ According to Duffield, the critical issue was whether biblical anthropology was in conflict with the doctrine of common descent as applied to humans. Judged against the datum of Scripture, his answer as to whether there was a fundamental conflict was a firm yes. The exegetical case, however, had to be carefully developed. If, for example, the account of Adam's creation in Genesis 2:7 was consulted, the reader would be within interpretive rights to maintain that the biblical and evolutionary accounts of human origins could be reconciled. Duffield's advice, however, was to read on. Later in the same chapter, the description of the creation of the first woman pointed, in language "specific and unambiguous," to a process "strictly supernatural, miraculous [and] wrought by immediate Divine agency." For Duffield, the literal, intended sense was clearly historical and scientific. The binding example of the Apostle Paul helped settle this hermeneutical argument. Paul, Duffield noted, accepted as "literally true that portion of the Mosaic record most troublesome to those who would harmonise evolutionism and revelation—the supernatural creation of *woman*."²⁹ It was clear to Duffield that Paul's assertions that the woman was created for the man (1 Corinthians 11:9) and that "Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13) would be wholly redundant if the Genesis account from which they were derived was merely symbolic. It was also clear that stripping the account of Eve's creation of historical content would undermine a divinely ordained ordering of the sexes, especially in the ecclesial realm. Paul's prohibition on women speaking in church or teaching and usurping authority over men would prove to be entirely fallacious.

Duffield's defense of the supernatural character of Eve's creation came hot on the heels of debates within his own denomination over the question

²⁸ John T. Duffield, "Evolutionism Respecting Man, and the Bible," *Princeton Review* 1 (1878): 150.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 155, 159 (emphasis original).

of female preachers. In 1872, the Rev. Theodore Cuyler had provoked a widely reported controversy by inviting the Quaker preacher Sarah Smiley to speak from his pulpit in the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn. After an impassioned debate at the General Assembly of the Northern Presbyterian Church, attention was called to an earlier ruling that “to teach . . . in public and promiscuous [mixed-sex] assemblies is clearly forbidden in the holy oracles.”³⁰ Four years later the issue flared up again when the Rev. Isaac See of Wickliffe Presbyterian Church, Newark, invited two female temperance activists to speak in his pulpit, precipitating a presbytery trial that ran for nearly two months.

These debates made it harder to propose anything other than a reading that underlined the plain historical sense of the description of Eve’s creation. For those keen to press the case for the compatibility of Calvinism and Darwinism, this created a problem. Such was the situation for geologist and Congregationalist George Frederick Wright. In an essay first published in 1880 and dealing more generally with the relations between the Bible and science, Wright candidly noted that “there is no difficulty at all in adjusting the language of the first chapters of Genesis to that expressing the derivative origin of species until you come to the story of the creation of woman out of the rib of Adam.”³¹ He was nevertheless keen to offer some kind of reconciliation with science. Directly quoting a recent proposal made by his fellow Congregationalist and president of Dartmouth College Samuel Colcord Bartlett, Wright suggested that Eve’s creation could be considered “a more or less anthropomorphic representation of an act involving I know not what physiological conditions.”³² With this recondite assertion, Bartlett maintained the basic “fact” of Eve’s derivation from Adam while leaving room for a more naturalistic-sounding account.

When Bartlett himself delivered the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary in March 1882, his suggestions regarding Eve’s creation were more carefully packaged. In his second lecture on “Early Man,” Bartlett declared that the “sublime verses” of Genesis 1 gave no grounds for deciding whether the creation of living things had been a “direct or mediate process.” As a result, there was “nothing in the first chapter of the Pentateuch [that was] decisive for or against the theory of evolution.” Then,

³⁰ Quoted in Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 94.

³¹ George F. Wright, “Relation of the Bible to Science,” in *Sermons on the International Sunday School Lessons for 1881* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1880), 25.

³² *Ibid.*

echoing the standard line, Bartlett declared that the problem came “in the second chapter, at the creation of woman.”³³ To attempt to overcome this, Bartlett offered two possible solutions. Citing the German biblical scholar Franz Delitzsch, Bartlett noted that the creation of Eve might be “externally regarded a myth,” but one founded on “a kernel of fact.”³⁴ Another possibility was to read the verses as a vision or dream rather than as a factual report.

Proposing such interpretations without careful qualifications was unwise, given the Seminary’s reputation as the center of Calvinist orthodoxy. In the final analysis, then, Bartlett judged these novel readings to be unnecessary and unsafe. For one thing, Bartlett believed that no plausible scientific scenario for the differentiation of the sexes could be given, even in principle. He further suggested that an allegorical reading would throw the Bible reader into “an ocean of uncertainties.” A yet more important reason for pulling back from a less than literal reading was the claim made in 1 Timothy 2:13 that “Adam was formed first, then Eve.” To Bartlett, this implied that Paul understood Eve’s creation in a patently literal-historical fashion. It also suggested that to undermine a straightforward reading of Eve’s creation risked unraveling biblical gender norms. As Bartlett noted, the scriptural assertion that “woman was taken from the side of man” established monogamous marriage as a divine ideal and marked out the home as “the empire of woman.” Warming to this theme, Bartlett declared that this ideal was the only solution to the “wrongs of woman.” To his mind, the recent “crusade of blind complaints” and the “scramble for man’s functions” promoted by advocates of women’s rights were doomed to failure. Such misdirected efforts worked against the restoration of the “great original law of paradise,” the only hope for a stable and godly society.³⁵ Bartlett’s address thus left the impression that accommodating an evolutionary account of the first female with the second chapter of Genesis was theoretically possible but that such a compromise carried significant dangers and was probably not even required.

Transplanted into a yet more conservative Presbyterian environment, there was even less scope for tampering with a conventional conservative reading of Eve’s creation. In 1884, James Woodrow, the Perkins Professor of Natural Science in its Relations with Revealed Religion at Columbia

³³ Samuel C. Bartlett, *Sources of History in the Pentateuch* (New York: A. D. F. Randolph & Co., 1883), 36.

³⁴ Franz Delitzsch, *New Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888), 143.

³⁵ Bartlett, *Sources*, 60–64.

Theological Seminary, South Carolina, and an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in the United States, delivered an address arguing that the theory of evolution was in harmony with the Bible understood as God's inerrant word. Woodrow's most controversial claim was that the physical frame of the first man was a product of gradual evolution and not the immediate creation of God. It was only when Woodrow arrived at the creation of Eve that he, like many others, hesitated. This account, he submitted, presented "insurmountable obstacles in the way of fully applying the doctrine of descent."³⁶ For that reason, he submitted that Eve's creation was a miraculous exception to the general rule that animals, including humans, were the product of evolution.

As others have shown, Woodrow's argument for the compatibility of Scripture and evolution stirred up significant and sustained opposition.³⁷ In October 1884 he was invited to defend his stance at the meeting of the Synod of South Carolina. Among the objections he fielded was the charge of inconsistency. If Adam's body was a product of evolution, why was Eve's supernaturally formed? In response Woodrow declared his unabashed belief in miracles. It was Woodrow's conviction that Eve's creation was a miracle "because God tells me so plainly in his word."³⁸

From the proceedings it is clear that Woodrow adopted a position similar to that of Duffield, Wright, and Bartlett on the sole scriptural obstacle for those otherwise happy to subscribe to an evolutionary account of humans. But once again, the professed reason—that the Genesis text communicating how Eve was formed had a plain and undeniable meaning—does not tell the whole story. There were, after all, alternative exegetical solutions on offer. Bartlett and Wright had, more or less cagily, suggested possibilities. Other commentators followed in conservative Presbyterian circles, such as the Baptist theologian George Dana Boardman and the Methodist scientist Alexander Winchell, had argued that the creation of Eve was symbolic rather than historical.³⁹

³⁶ James Woodrow, "Evolution," *Southern Presbyterian Review* 35 (1884): 356.

³⁷ For a summary, see Frank J. Smith, "Presbyterians and Evolution in the 19th Century: The Case of James Woodrow," *Contra Mundum* 6 (1993): 2–12. For full treatment, see David N. Livingstone, *Dealing with Darwin: Place, Politics and Rhetoric in Religious Engagements with Evolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

³⁸ James Woodrow, "Professor Woodrow's speech before the Synod of South Carolina," *Southern Presbyterian Review* 36 (1885): 47.

³⁹ See George D. Boardman, *Studies in the Creative Week* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1878), 223; and Alexander Winchell, *Preadamites; or a Demonstration of the Existence of Men before Adam* (Chicago: S. R. Griggs, 1880), 294–95.

Why, then, did Woodrow resist a non-literal reading of Eve's creation? As his own supporters noted, it would have protected his scientific reputation.⁴⁰ Woodrow, however, risked that reputation for good reason. For there is little doubt that treating Eve in the same way as he had treated Adam would have added severely to his difficulties. Among Southern Presbyterians, there was an underlying worry that meddling with Eve's creation would lend support to the cause of women's rights in general and women preachers in particular. In 1879, for example, Robert Lewis Dabney, the doyen of Southern Presbyterianism, had published a broadside against "women preachers" in the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, a journal edited by Woodrow. Among the biblical justifications for his critique was the fact that the first "female was made from the substance of the male."⁴¹ So it surely did not help that George Boardman, although adhering to a traditional account of gender hierarchy, had used the rich symbolism of Eve's creation to issue a clarion call for the social emancipation of women and for female suffrage.⁴² Alexander Winchell, too, had long advocated the right of women to education, property, and public office.⁴³

As it turned out, Woodrow's views on the role of women in the church and civil society were in complete accord with those held by his fiercest Southern Presbyterian critics. According to Woodrow, the whole women's rights movement was an unmitigated disaster. In an editorial published in the *Southern Presbyterian* in 1879, Woodrow celebrated the fact that, in the South, women's rights advocates had long been considered "an abomination." What was disconcerting, however, was the presence in the South of "male women, female lecturers, public speakers and preachers." This motley group signaled the "perversion of women's influence."⁴⁴

Woodrow's efforts to retain the special creation of Eve while being open to the possibility of human evolution had repercussions beyond his own denomination. The faculty of the Princeton Theological Seminary in particular became concerned about the impact the Woodrow case might have on their own standing as apologists for old-school and orthodox Presbyterianism. Their position on evolution had been characterized as close to

⁴⁰ See Marion W. Woodrow, *Dr. James Woodrow as Seen by his Friends* (Columbia, S.C.: R. L. Bryan Co., 1909), 100.

⁴¹ Robert L. Dabney, "The Public Preaching of Women," *Southern Presbyterian Review* 30 (1879): 700.

⁴² Boardman, *Studies*, 230–31.

⁴³ For Winchell's views on women, see Dorothy G. McGuigan, *A Dangerous Experiment: 100 Years of Women at the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Continuing Education of Women, 1970), 26–27.

⁴⁴ James Woodrow, "Woman's Work and Influence," *Southern Presbyterian*, July 17, 1879, 2.

Woodrow's by his defenders in the South. This association was not altogether welcome. When Archibald A. Hodge, professor of systematic theology at Princeton, was publicly quoted in Woodrow's defense, he wrote to Benjamin Warfield to express alarm. His published view was that theologians had the "most friendly interest" in a theory of evolution that acknowledged God's providential control.⁴⁵ But to Warfield, Hodge expressed serious doubts about human evolution and warned that all who agreed with Woodrow "must get ready to give up the account of the Genesis of Eve."⁴⁶ Hodge, for one, could not see how you could compromise on the mode of Adam's creation without also giving up on the supernatural formation of Eve. And to give up on the truth of "Eve made from Adam by the miraculous power of God" was to give up on "the whole scheme of redemption."⁴⁷

Anxiety over Eve was expressed again some years later in lectures to students on evolution by Warfield, newly appointed as professor of didactic and polemical theology. Warfield was keenly aware that the subject had to be handled delicately in the lecture hall. His tack was to demonstrate at some length that evolution was far from being established and that the Darwinian idea in particular was "very improbable."⁴⁸ On the other hand, he stressed that should evidence mount for evolution, theism would not be threatened. More than this, he felt able to say that there was not "any general statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation, either as given in Genesis 1 and 2 or elsewhere alluded to, that need be opposed to evolution." There was, however, one crucial exception:

The sole passage which appears to bar the way is the very detailed account of the creation of Eve. It is possible that this may be held to be a miracle (as Dr. Woodrow holds), or else that the narrative may be held to be partial and taken like the very partial descriptions of the formation of the individual in Job and the Psalms; that is, it teaches only the general fact that Eve came of Adam's flesh and bone. Neither view seems natural. And we may as well admit

⁴⁵ Archibald A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Chicago: 1878), 39.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Bradley J. Gundlach, "The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1845–1929" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1995), 198.

⁴⁷ Archibald A. Hodge, *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes* (Philadelphia: Board of Presbyterian Publication, 1887), 170.

⁴⁸ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Evolution or Development," repr. In *Evolution, Science, and Scripture: Selected Writings by B. B. Warfield*, ed. Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), 130.

that the account of the creation of Eve is a very serious bar in the way of a doctrine of creation by evolution.

This did not prevent Warfield from concluding his lecture by saying that the “upshot of the whole matter is that there is no *necessary* antagonism of Christianity to evolution, *provided that* we do not hold to too extreme a form of evolution.”⁴⁹ Allowing miraculous intervention was a *sine qua non* not least because it was one way of saving Eve from the reach of natural evolution.

Warfield, like Woodrow, cleaved closely to traditional views of gender roles, particularly within the church. In 1889, for example, he declared that the inexorable growth of women’s organizations was fraught with “hidden dangers to the church’s whole structure.” His proposed solution was a form of administration that incorporated the whole system of female institutions into the church without “transgressing the limits placed by God himself in his word upon the proper functions of woman in Christian society.”⁵⁰ Like Woodrow, Warfield was well aware that the historical fact of the creation of Eve from Adam was deemed essential in the task of defining and guaranteeing those limits.⁵¹

Warfield stood, then, in a line of conservative Presbyterian thinkers who strictly maintained the historical fact of Eve’s creation from Adam but who were willing to concede that Adam’s creation could be interpreted in a way compatible with an evolutionary origin. Among the reasons for this was the fact that, for these thinkers, the direct creation of Eve, as recorded in Genesis, safeguarded not just a particular understanding of human origins and human nature but also the gender norms that formed the essential building blocks of ecclesiastical and social order.

EVOLUTION, EVE, AND THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

The formidable resistance mounted by American Calvinists against attempts to alter how Eve’s creation was understood was easily matched, if

⁴⁹ Ibid., 130–31. See also David N. Livingstone and Mark Noll, “B. B. Warfield (1851–1921): A Biblical Inerrantist as Evolutionist,” *Isis* 91 (2000): 283–304.

⁵⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, “Presbyterian Deaconesses,” *Presbyterian Review* 10 (1889): 283–93.

⁵¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, “Paul on Women Speaking in Church,” *The Presbyterian*, October 30, 1919, 9.

not surpassed, by Catholic thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic. The weight not only of Scripture but also of tradition was brought to bear on efforts to argue for the compatibility of Catholic Christianity and evolutionary theory.⁵² And if it was hard to maintain, as some Catholic intellectuals did, that Adam's body was a product of evolution, it was yet more difficult to suggest that Eve too had an evolutionary past. The individual who bore the brunt of the widespread disapproval was the Catholic zoologist St. George Jackson Mivart. Following the fate of his interventions in the question of Eve's creation will shed light on exactly what was thought to be at stake.

A review of four books on evolution—Mivart's *The Genesis of Species* among them—which appeared in the July 1871 issue of the *Dublin Review* is a good place to pick up the story. The author, John Cuthbert Hedley, Benedictine priest and later Roman Catholic Bishop of Newport, was a relatively liberal voice among British Catholic theologians. In his review, Hedley cautiously allowed that it was not contrary to faith to assume that "all living things up to men exclusively were evolved by natural law out of minute life germs primarily created, or even out of inorganic matter." When it came to the evolution of the human body, however, Hedley found much less room for maneuver. After surveying the Church Fathers on Adam's creation, Hedley concluded in carefully chosen language that it "would be rash and dangerous to deny that the body of Adam was formed immediately by God and quasi-instantaneously out of earth." In the case of Eve, the space for compromise was even more constrained. Without exception, the Church Fathers asserted that "the body of Eve was formed of a rib of Adam, in the literal sense." The eminent Jesuit theologian Francisco Suarez had declared the creation of Eve from Adam's rib to be "Catholic doctrine." Cardinal Cajetan was the only prominent figure who had suggested otherwise, and he "had no disciples."⁵³

Just a month later Thomas Henry Huxley crafted his own critique of Mivart. Published in the *Contemporary Review*, Huxley's article rubbished Mivart's attempts in his *On the Genesis of Species* (1871) to reconcile evolution and Catholic orthodoxy. In his romp through the works of Suarez, Huxley, like Hedley, pointed out that the revered Jesuit had insisted that Eve's creation must be understood literally. It followed, Huxley argued, that for the "true son of the Church" Eve could never be regarded "the

⁵² For a detailed overview, see Don O'Leary, *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science: A History* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 16–128.

⁵³ John C. Hedley, "Evolution and Faith," *Dublin Review* 17 (1871): 22, 38.

result of evolution.”⁵⁴ This point was an incisive one. When Hedley later reviewed Huxley’s searing attack on Mivart in the *Dublin Review*, the point about Eve was conceded. Hedley’s statement, however, was a little less vigorous than before. Revising his earlier remark, Hedley noted that, “the Catholic teaching seems clearly to reject the view that . . . woman was formed or developed by natural process.” To this he added the observation that the “sacred narrative” did not specify “the mode in which Eve was made out of the body of Adam.” For all that, he confessed that “it must be held, *at present at least*, that Eve was ‘built up’ by an instantaneous act of Almighty God from some portion of Adam’s body.”⁵⁵

Despite being goaded into a response, during the 1870s and early 1880s Mivart avoided the question of Eve’s creation. In 1884, however, one of his most persistent Catholic critics brought Eve back into the fray. Among the points raised by the Rev. Jeremiah Murphy’s attack on Mivart was the unbroken consensus of the Fathers regarding the “immediate formation of the body of Eve.”⁵⁶ Mivart’s response to Murphy’s assault was published in *Nineteenth Century* in July 1885. Much of it was taken up with showing that the condemnation of Galileo had decisively shown that the Church’s pronouncements on scientific concerns could now be flagrantly ignored. Galileo’s fall was a fortunate one for the Catholic scientist. Despite this, Mivart did take the opportunity to deal specifically with the question of Eve. Drawing on the defense of his position made earlier that year in the *Tablet* by his friend, the priest Robert Francis Clarke, Mivart cited the example of Cardinal Cajetan and made a virtue of the exceptional nature of the Cardinal’s reading of Eve’s creation as parabolic.⁵⁷ Even if Cajetan’s position represented a minority of one among medieval theologians, his publicly expressed opinion that a literal interpretation of Eve’s creation was “absurd” had not been censured.⁵⁸ This demonstrated the generous latitude allowed on the question even in the sixteenth century. How much more freedom, then, should the Catholic scientist be allowed in the nineteenth? This ploy of Mivart’s did not dissuade Murphy from noting a month later that “the creation of Eve . . . is quite sufficient to determine the meaning of the Scriptural account of Adam’s formation, and quite sufficient

⁵⁴ Thomas H. Huxley, “Mr Darwin’s Critics,” *Contemporary Review* 18 (1871): 455–58.

⁵⁵ John C. Hedley, “The *Contemporary Review* for November 1871 and January 1872,” *Dublin Review* 18 (1872): 200 (emphasis added).

⁵⁶ Jeremiah Murphy, “Evolution and Faith,” *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 5 (1884): 761.

⁵⁷ Robert F. Clarke, “Faith and Evolution,” *Tablet*, May 23, 1885.

⁵⁸ St. George J. Mivart, “Modern Catholics and Scientific Freedom,” *Nineteenth Century* 18 (1885): 44.

to deter Catholics from adopting the Evolution Theory as at all applicable to man.”⁵⁹ Cajetan had been, after all, “eccentric,” and the weight of authoritative opinion was entirely against him.

By the 1880s, Mivart was already somewhat isolated within Catholic intellectual circles due to his radical views about the relationship between Church teaching and science. Mivart’s clerical supporters, however, found it particularly hard to follow his blunt dismissal of a literal reading of Eve’s creation. The efforts of the English priest John S. Vaughan to moderate Murphy’s attack on Mivart made no mention of Eve.⁶⁰ When another Mivart sympathizer did broach the subject, it was done with extreme caution. Writing in the *Dublin Review* in October 1885, the Jesuit philosopher Joseph Rickaby attempted to loosen the grip of the apparently binding nature of a literal interpretation of Eve’s creation. The Bible, Rickaby stressed, was written by men who had not “received any communication from heaven about the inward workings of nature.”⁶¹ Moreover, the mystical meaning of scriptural passages was “frequently more important than the literal.” This was true of the verses describing the creation of Eve. Those statements pointed beyond themselves to “our saviour the second Adam on the cross and the coming forth from thence his Spouse the Church who has the origin of her life in his sleep of death.” Although admitting that this truth was based on the literal meaning of Eve’s creation, Rickaby questioned whether there was an “explicit and formal consensus” among the Church Fathers about what that literal signification amounted to. Rickaby ventured to suggest that if no such consensus existed, Catholics could “take the rib and the sleep to denote some evolutionary process” without falling into heresy.⁶²

Rickaby’s circumspection illustrates just how difficult it was to explore the possibility, and the theological consequences, of an evolutionary account of the first woman. Mivart, on the other hand, used a naturalized account of Eve’s creation to push forward with his liberalizing agenda. In 1887, Mivart, resting on his argument that, since Galileo, Church tradition had lost all authority in the realm of inductive science, asserted with self-declared impunity that “the ribs of both Adam and Eve were formed by natural generation in the womb of some non-human animal.”⁶³ Although

⁵⁹ Jeremiah Murphy, “Faith and Evolution,” *Irish Ecclesiastical Review* 6 (1885): 491.

⁶⁰ John S. Vaughan, “Faith and Evolution: A Reply,” *Irish Ecclesiastical Review* 6 (1885): 651–64.

⁶¹ Joseph Rickaby, “What Has the Church to do with Science?” *Dublin Review* 14 (1885): 247.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 247.

⁶³ St. George J. Mivart, “The Catholic Church and Biblical Criticism,” *Nineteenth Century* 22 (1887): 46.

this claim was not mentioned in Bishop Hedley's public rebuke of Mivart in the same year, others were not slow to condemn Mivart's brazen statement about Eve's natural birth.⁶⁴ In 1889, for example, the Catholic layman and Conservative member of Parliament Edwin de Lisle fortified his general critique of the "evolutionary hypothesis" through a categorical defense of Eve's miraculous creation. Of Christian evolutionists like Mivart he asked "if God took an ape and breathed into its face the breath of intellectual life . . . why not our beautiful mother Eve?" The reason was clear. The Bible "expressly recorded that she is called woman because she is taken out of man." To read this as a fable would be to "reject the Church as an unscientific institution" and to give up on her "sacred traditions."⁶⁵ In the same year, John de Concilio, an American priest and popular author, made a more sustained attack on Mivart's evolutionism. In his widely read *Harmony between Science and Religion*, de Concilio observed that the creation of Eve prefigured the formation of the Church from the "sleeping body" of the crucified Christ. Mivart's hypothesis that "woman had descended . . . from an apish couple" meant that "the whole mysterious significance and prophetic presaging of the peculiar formation of woman is swept away [and] the narration of Genesis loses every possible meaning."⁶⁶

Discussions of Mivart's radical opinions on the evolution of Eve were not divorced from profound concerns in Roman Catholic circles over contemporary threats to the sanctity and meaning of Christian marriage. In 1880, Pope Leo XIII had issued his encyclical on Christian marriage to counter efforts to define the institution as an essentially civil rather than as a religious one. At the outset, the encyclical reminded readers of the "true origin of marriage." This origin, which was "known to all and cannot be doubted by any," was found in the creation of "man from the slime of the earth" and the provision of a companion taken by God "miraculously from the side of Adam when he was locked in sleep."⁶⁷ This reaffirmation of the miraculous formation of Eve from Adam provided the scriptural basis for Leo's subsequent discussion about the nature and importance of marriage. The union of man and wife, he pointed out, foreshadowed the incarnation and was also an image of the "mystical union" between Christ and the Church. As a sacramental reality, marriage should be protected and upheld

⁶⁴ John C. Hedley, "Dr Mivart on Faith and Science," *Dublin Review* 18 (1887): 401–19.

⁶⁵ Edwin de Lisle, "The Evolutionary Hypothesis," *Dublin Review* 21 (1889): 62.

⁶⁶ Januarius V. De Concilio, *The Harmony of Science and Religion* (New York: Fr. Pustet & Co., 1889), 163–64.

⁶⁷ Claudia Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals, 1740–1981*, 5 vols. (Ann Arbor: Pierian Press, 1990), 2:30–33.

by the Church rather than the state. This understanding was, however, under severe threat from “naturalists” who worshipped “the divinity of the state.”⁶⁸ Such naturalists were arguing that marriage was a product of human law rather than a divine act and made the role of the Church in relation to marriage ornamental rather than indispensable.

When Mivart mounted a defense of a traditional account of marriage towards the end of his life, it bore little relation to Leo XIII’s encyclical. In a piece published in 1896 in the *Humanitarian*, a journal edited by the American émigré, eugenicist, and radical suffragist Victoria Woodhull Martin, Mivart avoided entirely appeals to the institution of marriage in paradise. Instead he called on women to fulfill their duty as wives and good citizens to reproduce. According to Mivart, a growing number of wives with “young, handsome and well-born husbands and deservedly esteemed for their physical and mental endowments” were refusing “conjugal relations, when not prompted so to do by their own feelings.”⁶⁹ By such refusals, wives degraded themselves through an abdication of their moral duty and a capitulation to their “lower powers.” Mivart’s argument was, in effect, a version of positive eugenics designed to protect, as he put it, “the welfare of the state and . . . [the] nation’s very life.”⁷⁰ The future development of the human race was his chief concern, and Mivart referred to evolution rather than Eve to give his argument heft.

Read in the light of Leo’s encyclical and traditional Catholic dogma, this defense downplayed the theological moorings and meanings of Christian marriage. Even for those allied to Mivart’s liberalism, it left the door open to the dissolution of Christian marriage and the over-zealous pursuit of woman’s rights. When George Tyrrell, Jesuit priest and a leader of liberal Catholicism in Britain and beyond, tackled the issue of the “New Woman” in 1897, he made it clear that doubting Eve’s creation and its manifold spiritual meanings was helping to birth a movement utterly opposed to a Catholic account of womanhood.⁷¹ In his lengthy critique of advocates of woman’s rights, Tyrrell noted that “under rationalist principles . . . the story of the creation of Eve; of the primitive and divine institution of marriage; the belief in its elevation to the dignity of a sacrament typical of the relation of the Church to Christ her head and master—all this is relegated to the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ St. George J. Mivart, “The Degradation of Woman,” repr. in *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question*, ed. Ann Heilman (London: Routledge, 1998), 311.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 345.

⁷¹ George Tyrrell, “The Old Faith and the New Woman,” *American Catholic Quarterly Review* 22 (1897): 632.

region of myths.” Without Eve, the husband’s superiority within the context of the family—the “simplest social unit” and bulwark against individualism—would be reduced to an “ancient superstition.”⁷² Tyrell here summed up, at the end of the century, some of the key reasons why Catholic theologians placed Eve firmly outside the ordinary course of evolution even when they allowed that Adam’s body might feasibly have had an evolutionary past.

CONCLUSION

In 1949, the Catholic theologian Ernest Messenger, looking back over nearly a century of theological debate, remarked that “the whole strength of the conservative attitude rejecting any evolution of Adam has been the apparent impossibility of accounting in any natural way for the origin of Eve.”⁷³ In the light of recent scholarship on Christian attitudes to human evolution, Messenger seems to claim too much. What we have seen, however, is that among more conservative Christian thinkers, debates about how to interpret Eve’s creation did indeed play a key role in late nineteenth-century discussions about the consequences of an evolutionary view of human origins for theological anthropology. The creation of Eve frequently functioned as the “limiting case” in efforts to assimilate evolution into a theological understanding of human origins. What is more, when Eve was discussed the resultant theological debates quickly spiraled out into a much larger set of concerns over womanhood and marriage. This in turn frequently reinforced the sense that Eve’s derivation from Adam must be understood in literal terms or, at the very least, be protected from moves to read it as pure myth.

This paper has concentrated on three relatively discrete interpretive communities to underline the relevance of different cultural, social, and theological contexts to how Eve and evolution were discussed, and for purposes of comparison. In each “community,” certain issues loomed larger on the interpretive horizon than others. For British Anglicans, defending the physical union of husband and wife as set forth in Genesis 2 was connected with efforts to block the Deceased Wife’s Sister Bill. This issue was much less important to American Presbyterians more or less open to evolution but desirous to retain a literal reading of Eve’s creation. Instead, the

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ernest C. Messenger, *Theology and Evolution* (London: Sands & Co., 1949), 199.

encroachment of “woman’s rights,” especially into the ecclesial sphere, made a defense of a literal reading of Eve’s creation seem urgent and necessary. Catholics on both sides of the Atlantic shared these worries, but, when discussing Eve and evolution, they also identified a specific threat to the sacramental character of Christian marriage. Yet whatever the difference in emphases and outlook, there was a shared sense across all three constituencies that, to quote Jenyns again, the “account of the creation of *woman*” presented the greatest obstacle to the full acceptance of human evolution by devout readers of the Christian Scriptures.

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